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SUBJECT: THAI PM SURAYUD PROMISES CONTINUITY TO CAMBODIA

¶1. (SBU) Thai interim Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont's one-day visit to Phnom Penh October 15 was intended to reassure the Cambodian government of Thailand's stability and that the Thai government (RTG) would continue to strengthen ties between the two countries despite the change in government following the September 19 coup, according to the Thai Embassy. Thai Embassy Poloff Songchai Chaipatiyut told Pol/EconOff October 17 that the theme of Surayud's visit was continuity. Songchai said General Surayud briefed Cambodian leaders, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, on the current political situation in Thailand and promised to continue joint Thai-Cambodian projects.

¶2. (SBU) Specifically, Surayud committed to continuation of Thai projects to repair the road from Siem Reap through An Long Veng to the Thai border at Chong Sangam in Sisaket and four bridges along the road from Koh Kong in southwestern Cambodia to Trat. He proposed increased cooperation in combating the spread of avian influenza in the region. Songchai said that Surayud agreed to continue talks on revenue sharing of petroleum in the Overlapping Claims Area in the Gulf of Thailand. However, Surayud has moved responsibility for the issue back to the Thai MFA from the Ministry of Energy. The Cambodians, he said, asked Surayud to open two additional border checkpoints, one near Preah Vihear in northern Cambodia and a new checkpoint near the overcrowded border crossing at Poipet/Aranyaprathet. Surayud reportedly responded that the RTG would have to follow internal procedures for evaluating the RGC proposals before making a decision.

¶3. (U) Accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Pridiyathorn Devakula and Foreign Minister Nitaya Pibulsonggram, Surayud paid courtesy calls on National Assembly President Heng Samrin and Senate President Chea Sim.

¶4. (SBU) Songchai commented that there appeared to be a great difference in style between Surayud and former Prime Minister Thaksin. When Thaksin traveled, he always brought along a large entourage, including many Cabinet Ministers. Surayud had a small party and only two Ministers. More importantly, Thaksin's visits generally mixed official and private business (IT and satellite) concerns. Even former Foreign Minister Surakiart, who was a former member of PTT's board of directors, included business interests in his visits. In contrast, Surayud ties were not with business, but with the military, including the former resistance forces, when as a Special Operations officer he worked with the Cambodian resistance against the Vietnamese occupation. Songchai noted that Surayud's first congratulatory message from Cambodians on his appointment was from FUNCINPEC President Ranariddh, followed by former FUNCINPEC resistance General Nhek Bunchhay, although the government was quick to offer its congratulations, as well. Lastly, Songchai noted that Surayud knew sufficient Khmer that he generally

understood Hun Sen's remarks, though Surayud responded in Thai.
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